



Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
Answer to Question on Notice

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Reference No: SQ20-000266

LOW COST ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Question Date: 17 September 2020

Format: Spoken

Question:

Senator STOKER: What was the purpose of the measure that was allowing participants to access support through low-cost assistive technology under \$1,500 in value?

Mr Hoffman: There always has been the use of assistive technology and we have different bands in terms of its cost and in terms of the amount of cost justification or 'validation that's required'. 'Less than \$1,500' is one of those bands. What you are specifically referring to is the arrangement to allow the use of those funds for iPads and other communication devices. That was seeking to allow the continuity of delivery of service via teledelivery when people were not able to do it face to face. So there has been a take-up of that arrangement, and a number of providers, as Ms Rule was saying, have reacted very innovatively with the sorts of delivery mechanisms they have used to continue contact with people.

Senator STOKER: Can you tell me anything about the rates of take-up of that opportunity?

Mr Hoffman: Because it is within that band of allocation of AT up to \$1,500, rather than a specific line item for iPads, I don't have at hand the exact numbers. I am happy to take that on notice.

Answer:

There has been an increase in the take-up rates of participants utilising low cost assistive technology supports, including for iPads, primarily driven by participants who did not previously receive these supports. From 3 April to 20 September 2020, 24,663 unique participants have received a payment for low cost assistive technology for communication and cognitive supports, including iPads.



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VOLUME OF SUPPORTS

Question Date: 17 September 2020

Format: Spoken

Question:

Senator STOKER: That leads pretty well to my next question, because I was interested to know if the NDIA had seen any significant changes in the patterns of payments to providers during the pandemic compared to the same period, say, in 2019? I would be interested to know what claiming patterns remain the same and whether there are some that are different.

Mr Hoffman: It might be most helpful to give that in writing so I can give exact numbers and charts et cetera, but let me just make some general comments now, if that would be of assistance.

Senator STOKER: Sure.

Answer:

The NDIA has been closely monitoring payments to providers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 1 below refers to the payment trends observed during the first wave of the pandemic compared to average payments in the months immediately prior to the pandemic. Observed trends from 2019 are not directly comparable.

Payments across all support categories, with the exception of Social Community Civic (highlighted yellow in the table), remained stable or increased over the April to June 2020 period, compared to experience in February and March 2020.

Table 1 – Change in average weekly payments by support category

Support category	Average weekly payments over			
	June 2020	May 2020	April 2020	March - Feb 2020
Core				
Transport	\$6m	\$6m	\$6m	\$7m
Daily Activities	\$199m	\$191m	\$190m	\$169m
SIL supports	\$104m	\$104m	\$101m	\$90m
Non-SIL supports	\$94m	\$87m	\$89m	\$79m
Social Community Civic	\$61m	\$53m	\$58m	\$66m
Consumables	\$8m	\$7m	\$8m	\$6m
Capital				
Assistive Technology	\$13m	\$15m	\$13m	\$12m
Home Modifications	\$4m	\$4m	\$4m	\$3m
Capacity Building				
CB Daily Activities	\$48m	\$44m	\$42m	\$39m
Support Coordination	\$11m	\$10m	\$10m	\$9m
CB Employment	\$4m	\$4m	\$5m	\$6m
CB Other Supports	\$11m	\$9m	\$10m	\$9m
Total	\$364m	\$343m	\$346m	\$326m

Table 2 shows that overall payment trends observed during the first wave of the pandemic have continued during recent months. Payments for participants in Victoria (highlighted grey in the table below) are higher than average experience in January to March 2020.

Table 2: Average weekly payments since the pandemic started, compared to Jan-March 2020

	Average weekly payments over			
	Latest complete week (14/09/2020 - 18/09/2020)	August 2020	July - April 2020	March - Jan 2020
Comparison to other State/Territories				
VIC	\$72m	\$78m	\$75m	\$69m
NSW	\$130m	\$132m	\$122m	\$113m
QLD	\$83m	\$83m	\$75m	\$66m
SA	\$34m	\$34m	\$30m	\$26m
WA	\$30m	\$31m	\$25m	\$20m
TAS	\$10m	\$11m	\$10m	\$9m
ACT	\$7m	\$7m	\$7m	\$6m
NT	\$6m	\$6m	\$7m	\$5m
Total	\$372m	\$382m	\$351m	\$315m

Table 3 shows that the payment trends observed nationally across the support categories specifically have continued in in Victoria during Wave 2 of the pandemic.

Table 3: Change in average weekly payments, by support category, in Victoria

Support category	Average weekly payments over			
	Latest complete week (14/09/2020 - 18/09/2020)	August 2020	July - April 2020	March - Jan 2020
Core				
Transport	\$3m	\$2m	\$2m	\$2m
Daily Activities	\$33m	\$35m	\$34m	\$30m
<i>SIL supports</i>	\$10m	\$12m	\$13m	\$12m
<i>Non-SIL supports</i>	\$22m	\$23m	\$22m	\$19m
Social Community Civic	\$12m	\$13m	\$13m	\$16m
Consumables	\$2m	\$2m	\$2m	\$1m
Capital				
Assistive Technology	\$3m	\$3m	\$3m	\$3m
Home Modifications	\$1m	\$1m	\$1m	\$1m
Capacity Building				
CB Daily Activities	\$13m	\$13m	\$12m	\$9m
Support Coordination	\$3m	\$4m	\$3m	\$3m
CB Employment	\$1m	\$1m	\$1m	\$1m
CB Other Supports	\$2m	\$3m	\$3m	\$2m
Total	\$72m	\$78m	\$75m	\$69m



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Reference No: SQ20-000268

FAMILY AS PAID CARERS

Question Date: 17 September 2020

Format: Spoken

Question:

Senator LAMBIE: I understand that family members usually can't be paid as carers under a person's NDIS plan but that some people have received exemptions to the rule because of COVID. Is that right?

Mr Hoffman: Yes, that's a reasonable summary.

Senator LAMBIE: How long can family members be paid to provide care under those exemptions?

Mr Hoffman: There is not a fixed or certain time. These are individual cases, and it will vary in the individual circumstances.

Senator LAMBIE: How many family members have been given an exemption since March?

Mr Hoffman: I'm aware of two cases, but I will take it on notice to confirm that. That's the number that I'm aware of today.

Answer:

The NDIA is aware of six requests that have been approved due to exceptional circumstances since March 2020.



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Reference No: SQ20-000269

FAMILY AS PAID CARERS

Question Date: 17 September 2020

Format: Spoken

Question:

Senator LAMBIE: If you've only had two that are exempt, how many have you had that have asked to be exempt?

Mr Hoffman: Have asked for the ability for a family member to be a paid worker?

Senator LAMBIE: Yes.

Mr Hoffman: It would be not a huge number but a significant number. I don't know the exact number. We don't collect it in that way.

Senator LAMBIE: So what you're telling me is that you've had two that you have given exemptions to but that you have no idea of the numbers that have put in for an exemption?

Mr Hoffman: Two that we've agreed, yes. There have obviously been many more requests than that. I don't have the exact number. We don't record that in the decision-making, but I can take on notice our ability to get you a closer estimate.

Answer:

The NDIA does not collect aggregated data in relation to requests regarding family members as paid carers.



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Reference No: SQ20-000270

PPE DISTRIBUTION

Question Date: 17 September 2020

Format: Spoken

Question:

Senator STOKER: How is PPE distributed, and how many masks have been distributed in total and where to?

Mr Hoffman: The stockpile itself is managed by the health department, although there are dedicated email lines for the disability sector. The request is managed by Health staff against the protocols for distribution. If the answer is yes, it's then provided to us, as the agency, and we arrange distribution where it's required through a courier company. If you bear with me, I'll get the exact numbers that have been distributed. As of 7 September, we've distributed 193,000 masks to 271 organisations, delivering support to participants or 271 separate deliveries. In addition, the Victorian government itself has also been distributing obviously in Victoria. I can get a break-up by state and territory, but obviously they've predominantly been sent to Victoria, particularly in recent times.

Answer:

The Department of Health is responsible for approving the dispatch of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) from the National Stockpile. Once approved, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) is responsible for the logistics involved in distributing PPE to the disability sector.

As at 22 September 2020, the NDIA has distributed 203,120 items of PPE to 310 organisations. A breakdown of PPE by state and territory is below.

	Providers	PPE
New South Wales	53	25,700
Victoria	216	166,870
South Australia	5	900
Queensland	11	2,150
Western Australia	16	5,300
Northern Territory	0	0
Tasmania	7	2,000
Australian Capital Territory	2	200
Total	310	203,120